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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2214
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 6158
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 2210
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 006206

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TREASURY PASS TO FRB SAN FRANCISCO/TERESA CURRAN

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM TH
SUBJECT: INTERIM "CABINET OF OLD MEN" APPOINTED

REF: A. BANGKOK 6203

1B. BANGKOK 6080

Classified By: CDA Alexander A. Arvizu, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The interim cabinet was appointed on October 19. The King, addressing the group in his first televised speech since his operation three months ago, admonished them to improve Thailand's international image. The group includes mostly seasoned, non-partisan professionals. NGOs have raised objections to a few of the new ministers, mostly because they served in the ministries during the Thaksin administrations. However, as a whole, the group is being viewed preliminarily as competent, upright and professional, if somewhat uninspiring. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The new Thai Cabinet was announced on Monday, October 9, and had their audience with the King that afternoon (reftels). Interim Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont has chosen a cabinet of experienced professionals -- so experienced, in fact, that their age is already the subject of humor, with one paper calling them the "Cabinet of Old Men." Surayud named 22 ministers (including two ministers to the PM's office) and four deputy ministers (Agriculture, Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Transport). About half of the new ministers were former permanent or deputy permanent secretaries, rectors or deans of universities, or judges. The

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rest include former officials of advisory boards or foundations, and two former deputy ministers. The new interior minister is a Bangkok-born Muslim, and former Governor of Satun province (which borders with Malaysia); he should be well-prepared to deal with issues in the insurgency-plagued far South. There are two retired military officers in the Cabinet: Minister of Defense Boonrawd Somthas (one of PM Surayud's confidantes from Army service) and Transport Minister Admiral Thira Haocharoen. Deputy PM Pridyathorn Devakula (former Bank of Thailand Governor) will also serve as Finance Minister; Deputy PM Kosti Panpiemras (former Executive Chairman of Bangkok Bank) will also serve as Industry Minister. Septel provides names for the complete cabinet and biodata on key ministers.

13. (U) The King addressed the new ministers, the first time that TV has shown him speaking since his back surgery in July. He spent the bulk of this remarks emphasizing the

problems caused by the widespread flooding affecting much of the country, and urging the new cabinet to take steps to ameliorate the suffering of the population. He also admonished the ministers to work to improve Thailand's image with the international community: "A lot of people who are not Thai, who are foreigners, are saying that Thailand is not good. We have to try to change that. ... If we don't, our country will lose its good name and it will be difficult for our people to live happily. ... Therefore, we have to try and change what is not good, to improve matters. And that is difficult."

¶4. (C) Response to the new cabinet has been generally favorable, although there has been some sniping. The People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) representative criticized the government for including people with ties to the Thaksin government -- apparently including people like interim Foreign Minister Ambassador Nitya Pibulsonggram, who led the Thai team to the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations with the US, and Interior Minister Ari Wong-araya, who is a former Thai Rak Thai member. Some environmental groups are also critical of the new Energy minister, Piyavaste Amranand, who has a long history of involvement in privatization efforts and construction of power plants, both of which are unpopular with some of the NGO sector. Some have also leveled allegations of corruption against him. Interestingly, according to what their spokesman told us, the PAD was in touch with the Council for National Security last week to give its views on some of the candidates proposed for the cabinet. The Democrat Party Secretary General told the press that the new cabinet in

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general looked good to him, although he had reservations about Interior Minister Ari, due to his TRT ties. There has been no formal comment from TRT yet, although one former MP complained that the new cabinet would work too slowly and in an "obsolete" manner. It is too early to judge genuine

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public reaction yet, but, taken as a whole, the new ministers are likely to be viewed as competent and upstanding, although perhaps unexciting, professionals by most of the public.

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